

August 28, 2016

A SWORD !!!

Matthew 10:32-39

Here is some good news: *“Every one , therefore, who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before My Father in Heaven!”* (Matthew 10:32) This verse needs little interpretation. It just needs to be trusted. But, it is another example of how faith in Christ is never meant to be just personal, secret, or private. A relationship with Jesus Christ must be *acknowledged... before others!* Not just once at your Baptism, or, your Confirmation, or, on Christmas or Easter. If your faith is not active, then your faith is not Christian! Which leads to the next verse: *“Whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before My Father in Heaven!”* (v. 33) That’s the bad news. It sounds pretty cut and dry... at first. But, isn’t it possible to, first, acknowledge Christ before others, and later deny Him? Think about Peter. He was the one who responded to Christ’s question: *“Who do you say that I am?”* by proclaiming, *“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!”* (Matthew 16:14-16) He acknowledged Christ! Then, later, during Jesus’ trial in the house of the High Priest, Peter denied Him three times!” (Matthew 26:69-74).

How many are there who have professed Christ as their Lord and Savior but who deny this truth almost daily as if they had no relationship with Christ at all? How many are there who get Confirmed or join the Church only to stray away from the purpose of their spiritual journey by attending worship only infrequently, by never tithing, and by failing to serve or pray or witness or make disciples? They may never verbally *deny* Jesus, but their actions, or, as the case may be, their inactivity speaks volumes. The good news is that, like the sparrows, we are not forgotten. (Matthew 10:29-31)

Realize, however, that to be forgiven we need to repent. I learned a while ago that confession without repentance is like bragging about how bad you’ve been. We need to literally change our direction. We need to do more than just realize and acknowledge that we were wrong... we have to *do* what is right! Not just once or twice, but for the rest of our lives! *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but they who do the will of My Father who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and cast out demons in Your Name, and do many mighty works in Your Name?’ and then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers!’”* (Matthew 7:21-23) Yes, God may not forget us, but we will be judged! *“You will know them by their fruits!”* (Matthew 7:20)

The good news is that we *can* repent, receive forgiveness, and begin to bear good fruits again. The bad news is that faith in Christ is a *sword!* (v. 4) A few weeks ago, I spoke about the persecution that Jesus said would come. And that the Spirit of God would give the words they would need to speak. (Matthew 10:16-23) There is a time in every life when we will need to defend ourselves – our faith, and our beliefs. We will not be able to claim our athletic success as proof for our faith in God. We will not be able to claim our success in business as a sign of faith. And we will not be able to claim our educational accomplishments, or, our good health, or, our wholesome lifestyle... as any kind of evidence of our walk with Christ. Almost nothing earthly other than what is in our hearts can really be a defense for why we believe. Perhaps the persecution was already happening. *“I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household!”* (Matthew 10:35-36)

The sword – the sword of the Word of God – is so important that if we put anything before it, we are not worthy of Christ. *“Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and whoever*

loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me!" (v. 37) If anything prevents you from being faithful to Christ, a divisive two-edge sword will seem to exist in your midst. It is a hard thing to have such a love for the truth that it sets fire to your heart; and to know at the same time that there might be some you love who might not be willing to receive it, or are not ready, or, are resistant. When you have the light, and the people around you choose darkness, it cuts very deeply. When you burn with the purpose of the Kingdom, with grace, and with compassion...when the Word of God sets us on fire to serve through mission... when our hearts don't just ache for those in need, but they burn to do something about their plight... ..and those around us are indifferent, ...it cuts very deeply. Inspiration can be a sword. It cuts away the shadows of complacency. It wipes out lethargy, and it gives us a sense of strength to fight... to fight to destroy the evil in our midst, to demolish oppression, and to defeat Satan at his game. *"Whoever does not take up the cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me!"* (10: 38) The Cross is the sign of great sacrifice. It is a sacrifice to have to experience the divisiveness of the Word of Christ.

Even among believers, the battle one considers rising to fight may not be the same as the battle another is inspired to fight. One may want to emphasize mission while another may want to emphasize evangelism. And simply because of the passion each has for their gift, or, for what inspires them, there can be division. But Paul told us that *"there is a variety of gifts, but the same spirit."* (1 Corinthians 12:4) Every gift, he says, is meant to work together to build up the Body of Christ, the Church. *"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."* (12:7) And even though there will be occasions where there is division, they are not brought by Christ, but by the sword of our human short-comings, by our worldliness, by our insisting on our own way. We need to let go. *"Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for My sake will find it!"* (v. 39) When it becomes all about you (your life, your desires), you lose. When it becomes all about doing whatever it takes to live for the sake of Christ (the Body), you find!

Together we need everything we do to acknowledge Christ before others. And then Christ will acknowledge us before His Father in Heaven! But... it's all about Christ!